

**EXCERPTS FROM PUBLIC HEARINGS
HELD IN NORTHWEST FLORIDA
IN JUNE 2011**

Excerpts from Public Hearings Held in Northwest Florida in June 2011

Listed below are excerpts from comments from Florida voters concerning whether districts in Northwest Florida should be drawn to divide Northwest Florida vertically utilizing county boundaries or horizontally across the county boundaries. The hearings were held in Pensacola, Fort Walton Beach, and Panama City in June 2011.

Public Hearing in Pensacola on June 6, 2011

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Vertically Along County Boundaries

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 11-12

“Escambia County population is 297,619 residents according to the recent census. Registered voters, Democrat, No Party, Minority, et cetera, 110,000. Republicans, 84,000. Escambia County, unfortunately, has been divided into two Senatorial districts, both of them held by Republicans. Three State Representative Districts, all held by Republicans. That means 212,791 individuals, or 67 percent of Escambia County population is disenfranchised, because in 2000 Escambia County was divided up so that there would be two Senatorial districts versus one, because prior to 2000, Escambia County was a Senatorial district.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 19

“I am concerned about the past horizontal divisions in forming our districts. For different reasons as our previous speaker said, I would certainly ask this body to consider forming districts with Escambia County, Santa Rosa County vertically and not across the north part of the counties and then the south part.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 32

“[W]e need to go back and revisit how you move, how you set that district up and to assure that minorities have an opportunity to have representation in Tallahassee out of Escambia County.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 41

“Among the standards to be taken into account is that of geographical boundaries. That includes city and county boundaries. I want to address that aspect of the provision. At the present time, Escambia County, the largest county in the area with the largest population has no representation in the Florida Senate.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 53-54

“I think that it is important that your emphasis be put on how we can encourage the integration of these counties in order to maximize our potential to develop revenue, to encourage development and hold on to our citizens.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 56

“I would like to see the district lines drawn not between north and south, but county by county.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 61

“I would like to say that we live in a county, this is Escambia County. We have county government, we have county police and the least we can do is have districts that are within our county and close.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 67

“I would like to say that I would like to concur in creating the Escambia, Santa Rosa County District, if that is at all possible.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 73

“When you go through the process I would just like to say, there is enough population there that we could do three State Reps Seats, two from Escambia and one from Santa Rosa, and a majority of one Senate District[.]”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 75

“The current districting is unfair to the people in Escambia County as a whole, and I really would like to see the districting be more compact and vertical[.]”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 76

“Using existing count, Escambia County boundaries would allow racial minorities to having more equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 98

“I feel like Escambia County does not get its representation because of the way the lines are drawn and focuses effort on increasing our economic development so that we can be competitive here in Escambia County when compared to our sister county to the west.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 102-03

“So I concur with previous speakers, that districts should be drawn keeping counties together and with folks that have something in common together rather than the north/south divisions that we currently have.”

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Horizontally Across County Boundaries

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 49

“Without these horizontal areas of it we would be leaving off the large expanse of the state that is rural and agricultural, and we appreciate the continued focus on that through the state, and also this redistricting process.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 52

“I have no problem with the east/west boundary lines district and the way it is laid out, because that gives agricultural its representation and that is why I came today to tell you that agriculture needs its representation.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 59

“I think we should look at the districts in Escambia County with an eye to using the natural resources to determine the boundaries so that people can have a logical way of examining them.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 66

“[S]peaking on behalf of Escambia County Farm Bureau, we like the way the districts are east or west and for the benefit of the farmers, the people who grow our food, we would appreciate it if it would stay that way.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 83

“I have no problems with the way the Senate Districts are aligned and everything. South Santa Rosa County though, I felt for many years and everything, having us split up into having three different Representatives from our area and everything, I do like to see it go back and have the horizontal lines.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 89-90

“So I don't envy your job, but please take into consideration the east/west, get the Representatives to represent the districts such as the farmers or what-have-you and I would appreciate it very much.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 95-96

“I am just, very briefly, wanted to speak in support of the communities of interest of the fact that coast communities have different interests, different goals, different values than the rural communities in the north.”

Pensacola Public Hr'g Tr. at 106-07

“I live in Cantonment and when I go downtown or when I go to the beach, I love that part of my county, but I know it is very, very different from where I live and from where many of my fellow citizens live, and please keep in mind the demographics and the interest of the area and not just the arbitrary county lines in moving forward, because it is very, very different.”

Public Hearing in Fort Walton Beach on June 6, 2011

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Vertically Along County Boundaries

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 38

“I believe in vertical alignment of the counties. . . . I believe if our Representatives are representing north to south in the county, they will learn the south part. They will know the north part, and they will be fighting for their whole counties.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 44

“On behalf of the Destin City Council, we respectfully request that in our city, our small city of 12,305 people, that we have one House District, one Congressional District and one Senate District.”

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Horizontally Across County Boundaries

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 24

“I would ask you to consider that due to the unique nature of our geography that our interests have more in common horizontally across northwest Florida than we do vertically.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 27

“I totally agree with the beaches are the beaches and the north end are the north end, and I think those representing both up north and down south have that in common and they can take care of it a lot better.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 32

“Please keep the legislative districts in northwest Florida as close as you can to where they are today.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 35-36

“Please, I am begging you, do not replace the current district lines with a strict adherence to county boundaries, instead, link together the cities, the towns and the communities along the coast wherever possible for Legislative and Congressional Districts.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 47

“We would like, many of us in this area would like to have our beaches along the Gulf of Mexico more contiguous with our representation, and although that differs for many people who spoke earlier, I believe that there is opportunity to align things more horizontally as compared to vertically.”

Fort Walton Beach Public Hr'g Tr. at 51-52

“We have three main communities of interest in northwest Florida. We have our agriculture on the north, we have our military slash industrial, but mainly military in the center and we do have our tourism, and while I respect the gentleman's view that, well, you know, just keep it in Okaloosa County or keep it in Santa Rosa County, that makes your job harder, okay, because that makes you a mile wide and a quarter of an inch thin, when you are trying to represent interests, our interests in Tallahassee and you have to be an expert in military affairs, you have to be an expert in tourism, you have to be an expert in agriculture.”

Public Hearing in Panama City on June 22, 2011

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Vertically Along County Boundaries

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 24

“Bay County deserves our own State Senator and Representative, and with all due respect, Senator, your family has representation in both the House and the Senate, but Bay County does not.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 27

“Do not make beaches one and farmers one, because then you have unequal money that can buy influence. Please remember this is for all the state of Florida, not just one district or one group of people. Thank you.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 28

“But setting up the voting things I would like to see it done by county. Keeping one county together. I live in northern Bay County, and I have no Representative, you know, it is spread out over the whole area, and it is very, very frustrating.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 34

“Congressional District 1, you heard last night, should consolidate Okaloosa County as much as possible[.]”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 54

“It has been very confusing for the people of Bay County to have been split up into various districts. Unless there is a really good reason for it, a county should be kept in tact [sic].”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 66

“Now, speaking for Bay County, I do wish that we would hold – keep all of Bay County together.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 84-85

“I respect what the gentleman said a few speakers before. He gave the perspective of what it is like for a rural county, and for them, I mean, I guess that is something you will have to weight, but I don't think we need that in Bay County. I think we need basic – I would like to see Bay County be whole.”

Supporting Division of Northwest Florida Horizontally Across County Boundaries

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 41

“That we have coastal issues that are needed to be done by Representatives who are familiar with the coast, and then we have the rural areas that need to be represented by people that have an interest and need in the rural areas.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 45

“[P]arts of the beach are represented by different ones. They are basically, it is one community, you should have one, one representative there.”

Panama City Public Hr'g Tr. at 75

“Districts aligned according to these communities of interest will be better equipped to articulate their common cause and aggregate the power needed to make sure their voice is heard and their needs addressed.”